

rites of passage

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Spring is an exciting time for families of children leaving preschool as they plan for the transition to kindergarten. The transition may also become a time of concern for some families and educators. The National Association of Early Childhood Specialists in State Departments of Education have developed a position statement entitled, *STILL Unacceptable Trends in Kindergarten Entry and Placement*. Research indicates that: "extra year kindergarten programs place the child at risk of failure, apathy toward school and demoralization." The Michigan School Code reads: **'Right to attend school; right to enroll in kindergarten. Sec. 1147(2) In a school district where provision is made for kindergarten work, a child, resident of the district, is entitled to enroll in the kindergarten if the child is at least five years of age on December 1 of the school year of enrollment.'** (See the document in the Administrators section of the MDE website: www.michigan.gov/mde). "That means kindergarten, not a two-year planned program before first grade," states Renee De Mars-Johnson, Early Childhood and Parenting Programs Coordinator.

Dr. Samuel J. Meisels, Professor of Education and Associate Dean for Research in the School of Education with the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, has addressed three myths about America's kindergartens. Myth #1: "Raising the school entry age produces smarter kindergarten classes." Myth #2: "If children aren't ready for first grade, we do them a favor by holding them back." Myth #3: "Immature students or slow learners can benefit from two years of kindergarten." Narrative Summaries/Year End Reports and local follow-up evaluations for

children who have attended the Michigan School Readiness Program continue to reveal a percentage of children being "referred" for two years of kindergarten. "Developmental kindergarten" is designed to provide those children who are singled out as "not ready" the "gift of time." School districts/public school academies should revisit the research and findings with regard to this form of retention. As Dr. Meisels points out, "...the very alternatives selected to protect children from an inappropriate curriculum carry within them the seeds of failure, low self-esteem and reduced achievement."

The purpose and goal of Kindergarten Round-up was never to determine whether a child is "ready" for kindergarten. The purpose of



developmental screening, a federally funded project known as Child Find, helps districts identify those children who may be in need of referral for Special Education services before they enter kindergarten. Dr. Harriet A. Egertson, Administrator, Office of Children and Families from the Nebraska Department of Education, in her keynote address at the 2001 MiAEYC Kindergarten/Primary Conference, reported that a follow-up study of children who have attended two-year kindergarten, transitional first, or been retained in the primary grades would show that 30 percent of those children are likely to drop out of high school.

RECOMMENDED READING

As districts wrestle with the issues of children being ready for schools and schools being ready for all children, it is important to review what the research is showing. We recommend the following:

1. Part 1, *Ready Schools*, National Education Goals Panel. This can be viewed at their website at <http://www.negp.gov/>.
2. *Of Primary Interest* Newsletter, *STILL Unacceptable Trends*, Vol. 7 Numbers 3&4, Summer 2000. This can be viewed at <http://ericps.crc.uiuc.edu/naecs>.
3. *Of Primary Interest* Newsletter, *Grade Retention: A History of Failure*, Vol. 6 No. 2, Spring 1999. This can be viewed at <http://ericps.crc.uiuc.edu/naecs>.